

Privacy safeguards in Canadian military insufficient: Updated rules needed

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Privacy legislation and protocols to safeguard the health information of members of the military are lacking, and the head of Canada's military must take action to ensure health privacy for all staff, states an editorial in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (CAMJ).

Recent violations at Veterans Affairs Canada of privacy regarding sensitive [health information](#) raise questions about the military's ability to protect personal health information.

"Few of the world's armed forces provide complete [confidentiality](#) of personal health information," write CMAJ Editor-in-Chief Dr. Paul Hébert and colleagues.

This insecurity over privacy can have negative health impacts. Soldiers who have returned from military duty may hide symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, and consequently may not receive treatment which could have negative consequences.

"The only protection afforded military personnel is a weak federal Privacy Act and a commissioner who reports breaches to Parliament," state the authors. "The Act does little to address the many nuanced privacy issues in dealing with sensitive health information, which explains why several provinces have developed their own privacy laws for [health information](#)."

The authors urge the head of Canada's military, General Walter

Natynczyk, to ask the Federal Privacy Commissioner to conduct an independent review of military privacy protocols and develop clear recommendations for improvements. "Updated privacy rules should include, at the very least, a duty to offer explanations to a [military](#) patient if his or her personal information is to be disclosed to nonmedical personnel. Better yet would be a guarantee of privacy for mental health records...Most important, all policies, regardless of approach, must be subject to regular oversight and review by a professional civilian body," they conclude.

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